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NS Approved For Release 2003/03/28 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500030023-4

22 March 1955

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SYRIA POLICY CRISIS

I. Syria is still poised indecisively in dead center of explosive situation, as rival Middle East defense blocs (Iraqi-Turkish and Egyptian-Saudi) press for Syrian support. Buffeted by both sides, unstable regime (conservative President, leftist-dominated Prime Minister), faces policy crisis.

A. Egypt and Saudi Arabia, working through Syrian Foreign Minister Azm and Army Chief of Staff Shuqayr, have already obtained Syrian "agreement in principle" to their exclusively Arab pact.

1. Plan apparently calls for establishment in Damascus of "unified Arab command," under nominal Syrian leadership.
2. Syrian G-3 believed to be in Cairo now, working out details.

B. Iraq, in counter-effort, is trying to provoke split within Syrian government on "agreement" with Egypt, Saudis.

1. Successfully influenced two Syrian deputies who accompanied foreign minister Azm to Baghdad discussions of the rival pacts last week.
2. At same time, Iraq using both overt and clandestine means to sway Syrian government.

C. Turkey, Iraq's partner, also pushing Syrian government hard.

DOCUMENT NO. 32
(W) CHANGE IN CLASS.

II. DECLASSIFIED

CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S

NEXT REVIEW DATE: 1990

REF ID: A6500030023-4

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Approved For Release 2003/03/28 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500030023-4

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II. With Baghdad meeting concluded, Syria faces policy crisis, possibly even cabinet crisis in next weeks:

- A. Syria wants to temporize, but faces mounting pressure to make choice: Cairo or Baghdad?
- B. Upper hand held by Foreign Minister Azm--backed by Army Chief of Staff at home, Egypt and Saudi Arabia abroad.
 - 1. This group may force opportunistic Prime Minister Asali to end stalling, declare for Cairo.
- C. If this done, Western-sponsored Iraqi-Turkish defense bloc will have been dealt severe blow--at least in Arab world.
 - 1. So far, little prospect that pro-Iraqi and pro-Western forces in Syria can capture government, otherwise reverse trend.

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